

The contaminated five aggregates are *contaminated* because they were produced by ignorance misperceiving reality, other delusions (such as anger, attachment etc.), and karma. Further, the contaminated five aggregates are *pervasive compositional suffering*. Therefore, please note that whereas the other two types of suffering (the **suffering of suffering** and the **suffering of change**) refer to feelings alone, pervasive compositional suffering includes the entire psycho-physical complex (i.e. the five aggregates/the mind-body continuum) that accompanies those feelings. The contaminated five aggregates are *pervasive* suffering because it is the nature of those aggregates that they have within them the potential to manifest suffering. Even though there are times when problems and discomfort are not present, they are always there in a potential form, and may arise any time. Moreover, all our feelings and experiences are the product of karma and delusions, and they carry with them the potential for future suffering. There is simply no experience within cyclic existence (whether pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) which is not rooted in contaminated karma and delusions, and carries the future potential for pain and misery. In whichever realm sentient beings are born under the power of karma and delusions, this is the pervasive condition. Therefore, the third type of suffering is *compositional* or conditional suffering (in some translations it is also called "the suffering of conditionality") because the very condition of being born with the contaminated aggregates, i.e. being born in cyclic existence, means that our psycho-physical aggregates are the result of previous karma and delusions, and bear the seeds that produce future misery.

Another way to categorize suffering is into the four types of suffering:

1. The suffering of birth
2. The suffering of sickness
3. The suffering of aging
4. The suffering of death

(These four will be explained below, for they are contained within the eight types of suffering)

The category of the eight types of suffering:

1. The suffering of birth
2. The suffering of aging
3. The suffering of sickness
4. The suffering of death
5. The suffering of encountering what is unpleasant
6. The suffering of the separation from what is pleasant
7. The suffering of not getting what we want
8. The suffering of (having) the five aggregates

The eight types of suffering are mentioned in Nagarjuna's **Letter to a Friend**:

*Your highness, be disenchanted with cyclic existence, which is the source of many sufferings: not getting what you want, death, disease, aging, and the others.*

### The suffering of birth

This category has five points to contemplate:

- 1) Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because there is suffering at the time of birth itself
- 2) Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because beings are born with negative tendencies
- 3) Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it is the source of suffering
- 4) Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it is the source of afflictive emotions
- 5) Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it results in an unwanted separation

#### 1) *Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because there is suffering at the time of birth itself*

In general the birth process in the desire realm is painful. More particularly there are four types of beings whose birth is accompanied with intense pain: beings born in the hell-realm, beings born in the preta (hungry ghost) realm, beings born from a mother's womb and beings born from an egg. From the point of view of birth as humans, it is obvious that the process of giving birth to a child is associated with severe pain for both mother and child. Regarding the suffering of the child:

Nagarjuna says in his **Friendly Letter**:

*You are gradually squeezed as hard  
As one crushes sesame.  
Being born: is anything like this?*

Further Pabonka Rinpoche describes the suffering of birth very vividly in his ***Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand***:

*In other words, the suffering is like having your body squeezed in a vice. When you emerge your skin is like raw flayed cow hide; and when you are placed on a cushion, no matter how soft, it is like being thrown on a bramble patch. When you feel an outside wind it is like being penetrated by a sword. When your mother takes you in her arm and carries you, it is like a sparrow being carried off by a hawk. These things terrify you.*

*All your learning from past lives is veiled and you have absolutely no wisdom at all. You even have to learn from scratch how to eat, sleep, walk, and sit.*

*When you meditate on your birth from the womb it should not be goggling at someone else: you should develop insight into how you are certain to have such a birth again, and what it would be like. You should think about the sufferings mentioned in **The Sutra for Nanda for Entering the Womb**.*

*Some may think that the sufferings of birth do not harm because they have already finished with them. But until we set a future limit on our samsara we must re-experience the sufferings of birth an infinite number of times.*

2) *Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because beings are born with negative tendencies*

When we take birth in cyclic existence we are born with, what are called "negative tendencies". Negative tendencies refer to the seeds and imprints of afflictive emotions (and contaminated karma). They hold the potential to experience unwanted circumstances and result in us having little control over our future experiences. Furthermore, since they are produced by afflictions such as ignorance, anger etc. they are incompatible with wisdom. Therefore, they make it difficult to direct our mind onto a virtuous course, leave us only limited freedom or self-control to follow our aspirations, and are responsible for encountering all kinds of obstacles. The negative tendencies strongly influence all the factors that constitute our existence and naturally produce, sustain and increase further afflictive emotions.

3) *Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it is the source of suffering*

By taking birth in cyclic existence under the control of afflictive emotions and contaminated karma, we are bound to experience the various types of problems and difficulties such as the sufferings of aging, sickness and death. Those sufferings are initiated by our birth because the moment we are born is the moment we start aging and the moment we start moving towards the time when we experience illness and other mental and physical discomforts. Furthermore, from the moment we are born we embark on our inexorable journey towards death. Therefore, our birth is the beginning or the source of all the other types of suffering.

4) *Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it is the source of afflictive emotions*

Birth is not only the source of suffering but also the source of the *causes* of suffering. Afflictive emotions such as the three poisons of attachment, aversion and ignorance are the causes of our problems and difficulties in cyclic existence. We are born with sense faculties such as eyes, ears, and so forth which allow us to make contact with the outside world. When, for instance, the eye sense powers (the eyes) and an external object of sight come together, an eye consciousness apprehending that object of sight arises. Since every moment of awareness is concomitant with a mental factor of feeling, a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling arises together with the eye consciousness and apprehends the same object. This feeling then triggers one of the three root delusions. In general, a pleasant feeling induces attachment, an unpleasant feeling aversion, and a neutral feeling ignorance. The moment those afflictive emotions arise in our mental continuum they unsettle our mind and body, disturbing any sense of satisfaction and peace. Furthermore, they set off a chain of other delusions and contaminated actions (karma) of body, speech, and mind. Those actions in turn result in future rebirths in cyclic existence and in experiences that are in the nature of suffering. Therefore, not only are the afflictive emotions the *causes* of our birth, our birth is also the *source* of more afflictions. In this way, we are trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle, immersed in reacting instinctively to the results of anger or attachment with further aversion or craving.

5) *Birth is (in the nature of) suffering because it results in an unwanted separation*

After our birth the only event that is certain is that of our death. In fact, our birth is not only the *cause* of our present mind and body it is also the *cause* of the deterioration of our present mind and body, i.e. it is the *cause* of our impending, inevitable and unwanted death.

